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ABSTRACT

In order to examine the black college student's values toward mate selection, the potential desirable traits of a future spouse were divided into instrumental and expressive traits. Instrumental traits are those which serve the family's essential material needs, while expressive traits serve the family's emotional needs. Possible differences by sex, parental education, and parental occupation were investigated. Results showed that black female students tended to give more importance to instrumental values than male students. No differences between male and female students were found in their emphasis on expressive characteristics. Parental education and parental occupation failed to produce any significant differences on the instrumental and expressive traits desired in a potential mate. (Author/NG)

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INSTRUMENTAL AND EXPRESSIVE VALUES IN MATE SELECTION AMONG BLACK STUDENTS*

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INSTRUMENTAL AND EXPRESSIVE VALUES IN MATE SELECTION
AMONG BLACK STUDENTS.

ABSTRACT

The major purpose of the study is to examine the black college students' values toward mate selection. The potential desirable traits of a future spouse are divided into instrumental and expressive traits in order to investigate the possible differences by sex, parental education, and parental occupation. The study concludes that the black female students tend to give more importance to instrumental values than male students. No differences between male and female students are found in their emphasis on expressive characteristics. Parental education and parental occupation failed to produce any significant differences on the instrumental and expressive traits in a potential mate.

INTRODUCTION

Romantic love has revolutionized male-female relationships to the extent that it serves as a basic criterion in choosing a mate in highly industrialized societies. The societies of the Western world attach greater importance to love as a basis for and a prelude to marriage. Non-western cultures emphasize romantic love after marriage. Kephart (1977) observes that no other society and no other period has so nearly institutionalized emotion as the principal basis for marriage. Ralph Linton (1936:175) asserts that the present American culture is practically the only one which has attempted to capitalize emotional attachments and make them the basis for marriage. In fact most American people believe that one should not get married without failing in love because it is not only the right think to do, but it is a panacea.

Ideals pertaining to romantic love are highlighted by many writers.

> The definitions of American culture states that love is spiritual and ending and is not aimed at specific narrow material ends. Love is a relation between persons, not between things. It means unity, not difference. It means who you are, not how well you perform. It means trust, faith, affection, support, loyalty, help when it is needed and the kind of help that's needed. Love means that one is never forsaken, betrayed or abandoned. Love is freely and unselfishly given, or it is not really love in American culture. (Schneider, 1968: 50).

Whether or not these idealsare translated into practical behavior is the question few scholars have attempted to answer. There is a lack of material on the validity of the claim that emotional affection is the basis for marriage. Also paucity of information is found pertaining to the influence of non-affectional factors in mate selection. Melton and Thomas lament that "there is little research on the prevalance among various segments of our society of non-affective reasons for choosing a particular mate" (1976:509). The present

research focuses its attention on the influence of both affectional and non-affectional values in the selection of a mate in an attempt to examine the possible differences in value orientation among black students.

Although individuals are socialized to adhere to the ideology of romantic love, the process of mate selection operates like a market system. Exploitation, rating of potential partners and evaluation of economic worth are common in the courtship (Goode, 1964). Instrumental as well as expressive characteristics of a future spouse are bargained in the process of mate selection. According to Waller (1930: 240) "the traits which determine whether one will win, place, or show in the marriage competition are such things as family background, economic power, education, and personal qualities such as age, beauty, and sexual attraction." The research supports the contention that the process of seeking a spouse usually results in homogamous marriages. The dating is more likely to occur among youth who are similar in social class and are likely to live close to one another. Race and religious factors also influence the selection of a partner. The weight of these factors would suggest that non-affectional values also play a major role in choosing a future mate in as much as romantic love ideology.

In every society families are expected to meet certain role responsibilities and provide basic needs of their members. How well a family functions is usually measured in terms of the degree to which the responsibilities are fulfilled and the needs are met. It is expected that one's attitudes and sentiments toward the characteristics of the future spouse would have influence on the anticipated set of family objectives. It can be conceptualized that the family role

responsibilities can be studied in terms of instrumental and expressive family functions. Functions that are essentially instrumental in character would serve to maintain both physical and social integrity of the family system by providing food, shelter, clothing, and health care to its members. Functions that are essentially expressive in character would maintain and enhance harmonious interpersonal relations and emotional well-being among family members. Some other functions are a mixture of both instrumental and expressive qualities. According to Parsons, the instrumental function relates the system to "its situation outside the system, to meeting the adaptive conditions of its maintenance of equilibrium, and instrumentally establishing the desired relations to external goal objects. The expressive area concerns the internal affairs of the system, the maintenance of integrative relations between the members, and regulation of the patterns and tension levels of its component units" (Parsons and Bales, 1955: 47). These two functions are highly interrelated and their effective execution depends not only on the structure of the family system but also on the larger society. A tendency appears in the literature to the extent that the black family is failing to provide these functions adequately which resulted in the instability of the black family. But it is argued that since the opportunities to fulfill these functions varied greatly for different segments of black community, the ability of the black families to meet these role obligations of the society also varied across a wide spectrum.

Instrumental and expressive functions can be employed to examine the factors which could influence qualities most desired in a future spouse. Among Blacks, the two functions are not fulfilled as distinctly as they are among

Whites. The members of black families have a history of fulfilling these functions interchangeably. Research reveals that it is not uncommon for Black males to engage in expressive function in regard to the maintenance of family solidarity and to assist in child rearing and household tasks. "The instrumental role of many Black women is well known. A large number of working Black wives help to keep many Black families in the middle class category, or at least out of poverty. Even Black youth participate in family affairs by caring for younger siblings and occasionally working to supplement the family income" (Staples 1976: 125). Billingsley (1968) also recognizes the fact that the Black wives and mothers often play a predominant role in the execution of instrumental functions. Since most of the older children are socialized in the Black families to play the role of the principal adult members, boys and girls often take on role behavior generally considered to be prescribed according to their sex. In some low income black families older daughters assume the role of husband and father.

Because of the insecurity in getting income adequate enough to meet the instrumental needs of the family members, it is assumed that there will be a fluid interchanging of role between husband and wife in the black family. Economic insecurity and the consequent socialization in the family to take on both expressive and instrumental functions would inevitably influence the black students with respect to the qualities most desired in a future spouse. Since the family stability is also related to the income level, the socialization

process would vary from one income group to another. The foregoing discussion suggests that the wife and husband role expectations are interchanged in such a manner that it is difficult to counter the argument that the lines between expressive and instrumental functions are blurred and indistinctive in the black family. As a result six major hypotheses are developed:

1. Black male and females students' do not differ in scores on the instrumental dimensions of mate selection.

2. Black male and female students' scores will be similar on the expressive dimensions of mate selection.

3. Black students' scores on the instrumental dimension are unrelated to their parents' occupational status.

4. Black students' scores on the expressive dimension are not related to their parents' occupational status.

5. Black students' scores on the instrumental dimension are unrelated to their parents' educational levels.

6. Black students' scores on the expressive dimension are not related to their parents' educational levels.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were collected from a sample of 206 black students who were enrolled at Jackson State University during the Summer of 1977. These undergraduate students were asked to fill out a questionnaire which included questions pertaining to demographic and socioeconomic status and 23 items relating to personal traits desired in a mate. Most of the items of campus values in mate selection are taken from the earlier studies (Himes, 1949; Sussman and Yeager, 1950; Hudson and Henze, 1969; Melton and Thomas, 1976).

In answering the statements about traits desired in a mate, the students were asked to make judgments of relative importance regarding each of the 23 items. Degree of relative importance is measured as follows: not very important (1), slightly important, (2), moderately important (3), very important (4), and extremely important, (5). It is expected that the high score on these items indicates the most desired traits in a mate. Twelve items are used to create instrumental and expressive values scales of six items each. They are selected by Melton and Thomas (1976) after a factor analysis was conducted on all items using the varimax factor rotation with four factors. It was decided that two factors consisting of six items each represented clustering of items on instrumental and expressive dimensions. The two dimensions used by Melton and Thomas (1976) are utilized in the study to represent instrumental and expressive values.

In order to measure socioeconomic status of the students, each respondent was asked to indicate (1) the highest educational level completed by each parent, (2) the annual income of both parents, and (3) the occupation of each parent.

In order to eliminate the conceptual ambiguity associated with composite S.E.S. Index, educational and occupational prestige scores are used as indices of socioeconomic status. The demographic data reveal that nearly 30 percent of the students do not have a father because of either death, divorce, desertion, or separation. Thus father's occupation as an index of S.E.S. for these cases could not be used. Hence, if father's occupation is available, it is taken as a measure of parent's occupation; otherwise mothers occupation is taken into account to evaluate students' S.E.S. Occupational prestige scores are derived by assigning weighted values obtained from the socioeconomic status scale presented by Miller (1977: 217-130). This scale classifies occupations into seven major categories from lowest to highest occupations with their weighted scores. The list is as follows: laborers, except farm and mine (1); service workers (2); operatives and kindred workers (3); cratesman, foreman and kindred workers (4); sales, clerical and kindred workers (5); managers, officials and proprietors (6); professionals, technical, and kindred workers (7). The second index of socioeconomic status, parents' educational levels are measured by the question: "What is the last grade your parents completed in school?" Eight alternative responses which are listed for both father and mother include no schooling, some elementary, completed 8th grade, some high school, completed high school, some college or special training, completed college, and beyond college. On the basis of the mean value, two socioeconomic status variables, parents' education and parents' occupation are divided into two categories: high and low. An analysis of variance and Kendall's rank order correlation are used to compare the students ranking of desirable traits for a future spouse.

FINDINGS

Table I presents data on instrumental and expressive values of Black students. The first hypothesis indicates that the black male and female students do not differ in their emphasis on the instrumental dimension of mate selection. Data, however, reveal that the mean scores for males (3.82) and females (4.17) do differ on the instrumental traits contrary to the predicted direction. The analysis of variance reveals that the difference between males and females is significant at .001 level on the relative importance of instrumental characteristics of mate.

The second hypothesis predicts that the black male and female students are similar on the scores of the expressive dimensions of mate selection. The mean score for males (4.20) and females (4.30) suggest that females tend to give more importance to the expressive characteristics of their future spouse when compared to the male respondents. However, the difference between males and females on expressive traits is not significant. Hence, the data support the hypothesis that the males and females are similar in emphasizing relative importance of expressive traits of their future spouse.

The third hypothesis postulates that the students scores on the instrumental traits scale are unrelated to their parents' occupational status. Data reveal that the mean score for the students' whose parents' occupational status is low (3.94) is almost identical to their counterparts (3.94) suggesting that the null hypothesis is supported. It implies that the parents occupational status failed to differentiate the students attitudes toward the relative importance of the instrumental traits in their future spouses.

The fourth hypothesis predicts that the mean scores of the students of the expressive traits scale are not related to their parents' occupational status. Table 1 reveals that the mean scores for the students whose parents' occupation status is low (4.23) and somewhat different when compared to their counterparts (3.99) but the difference is not significant. It indicates that the parents' occupational status does not effect the students attitudes toward the relative importance of expressive traits.

Parental education is taken as another index of socioeconomic status to examine its influence on the students attitude toward expressive and instrumental characteristics in hypotheses five and six. It appears that parental education explains greater degree of variance on these characteristics when compared to parental occupation. The fifth hypothesis assumes that the black students' mean scores on the expressive dimension are not related to parental education. This null hypothesis is sustained by the data as the mean score difference between the students whose parents' education is high (4.32) and their counterparts (4.16) is not significant. The six hypothesis states that there is no relationship between the students' mean scores on instrumental dimension and their parental education. The mean difference between the students whose father's education is high (4.02) and their counterparts (3.91) is so small and trivial, parents' educational level produced no significant differences on the attitudes of the students toward instrumental values of their spouses.

In general, the study reveals that black females attach greater importance to instrumental traits of their mate when compared to their counterparts. Sex did not reveal any significant differences on the relative importance of expressive

traits. Parental occuaption and parental education failed to reveal any significant difference on the instrumental and expressive traits in a potential mate.

Table I also shows the correlation ratio (E^2) between two dimensions of scales, and sex, parental occupation, and parental education. It is observed that sex alone can explain about 5 percent of total variation in evaluation of instrumental traits. It is not surprising to note that sex is significantly related to the difference on the relative emphasis of instrumental values, since sex is traditionally related to differential expectation of role performance. The instrumental role of providing economic security and fulfilling the needs of the family members is traditionally the responsibility of the husband. Although the instrumental and expressive functions are performed interchangeably black males and females, it seems that the ultimate responsibility of providing family's economic well-being rests with the husbands.

The ranking of 12 instrumental and expressive traits is done on the basis of the mean value for both males and females. As seen in Table 2, females when compared to males attach greater importance to the instrumental traits of a future mate. Except one instrumental item (college degree), all other items received a mean score of 3.5 or greater for both males and females suggesting that these traits are considered at least very important. Three items "paying bills," "kind and considerate," and "work and save," received a mean score of 4.5 or greater by female respondents which indicate that these are considered extremely important. Black males did not treat any of the traits as extremely

important. The most significant differences between males and females are found found on two items of instrumental traits. "Paying bills" and "work and save" trait are given ranks 1 and 3 respectively by the female respondents while the same items are ranked 9 and 8 respectively by males. In general, there is a tendency for black males to score higher on expressive traits, while females tend to score higher on instrumental traits.

For these 12 items, Kendall's rank order correlation, tau, was computed to examine the degree of agreement between males and females on these items. The correlation of .59 indicates a moderately high degree of agreement on the relative importance of the items. The major differences appear to be that males attach greater importance to expressive values while females place relatively greater emphasis on instrumental traits of their future spouse.

Table 3 presents the mean values for black males and females on all 23 desirable traits of a mate. The ranking of these values reveals that the females tend to consider "paying bills" and "work and save" traits in their future spouse to be more important when compared to their counterparts. Males select "sexual attraction" and "good cook" traits as most important in their future wives when compared to the relative importance females attach to these characteristics in their potential mates. Kendall's rank order correlation of .64 incicates a somewhat high degree of agreement on the relative importance of these items. It implies that the black males and females place similar emphasis on the desirable traits of a mate. When compared to the tau value for 12 desirable traits, the value for 23 desirable items indicates a greater agreement between males and females. In general, the differences in their value orientation are not as striking as one would suspect.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study is designed to compare the values of black male and female students regarding mate selection. Six hypotheses are developed to investigate the differences on the relative importance of the instrumental and expressive traits of a potential mate by sex and socioeconomic status variables. Data reveal that females assign greater importance to instrumental traits in selecting a mate than males. There is also a tendency for female respondents to give more importance to the expressive characteristics in a future spouse when compared to males. Analysis of variance produced no significant differences between socioeconomic status variables (parents education and parents occupation) and two dimensions of family life. However, fathers' education seems to explain the variance in the instrumental and expressive values in higher proportion than the fathers' occupation.

Traditionally the instrumental functions are performed by husbands and fathers while the expressive functions by wives and mothers. However, these functions are fluid and interchangeable in the black community because of the restricted economic opportunity for many centuries in the United States. Both instrumental and expressive functions are involved in many activities of the family life. Whenever economic hardships are confronted, husbands and wives exchange traditional role expectations. These exchanges may result in role reversals which are demanded by social structure in order to get the job done. Husbands may attend household duties while the wife may seek a job outside the family in order to support the family members. It is assumed then that

the black students who are socialized to perform both functions and have observed role reversals between father and mother would perceive his potential wife to possess not only expressive characteristics but also to share the breadwinner role along with him. Likewise black female students would expect their future mate to fulfill the provider role but also share with her the expressive functions.

As far as expressive traits are concerned, the study reveals a high degree of similarity between male and female respondents, and low and high socioeconomic status students. The importance of expressive dimension seems to be widely diffused among blacks which is also a characteristic found throughout the American society. Although the findings of the study may not be generalized beyond the sample, the results suggest that differences exist between black males and females in values concerning mate selection. A further study comparing the males and females of both whites and blacks may prove to be a significant study in revealing either similarities or differences on two dimensions of mate selection traits.

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TABLE 1. MEAN SCORES. F-RATIOS AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL AND SEX AND S.E.S. ON INSTRUMENTAL AND EXPRESSIVE SCALES

Variable	Mean	df	MS	f	P≤	Σ^2
			Expression Dimension			
Sex:						
Male	4.20 (N= 122)	1	18.75	1.40	____	.007
Female	4.30 (N= 88)	205	13.38			
Parental Occupation:						
Low	4.23 (N=87)		.20	.02	____	.000
High	4.24 (N=120)	205	13.47			
Parental Education:						
Low	4.20 (N=107)	1	41.00	3.09	_____	.015
High	4.32 (N=100)	205	13.27			
			Instrumental Dimension			
Sex:						
Male	3.82 (N=122)	1	212.12	10.87	.001	.050
Female	4.17 (N=85)	205	19.52			
Parental Occuaption:						
Low	4.00 (N=87)	1	4.79	.23	____	.001
High	3.94 (N=120	205	20.53			
Parental Education:						
Low	3.91 (N=107)	1	22.77	1.11	____	.005
High	4.02 (N=100)	205	20.44			

TABLE 2. MEAN SCORE AND RANK FOR 12 DESIRABLE TRAITS

Traits	Total Sample	Rank	Males	Rank	Female	Rank
1. Kind and Considerate (E)	4.46	1	4.42	1	4.58	2
2. Understanding (E)	4.31	2	4.33	2	4.39	6
3. Mutual Affection (E)	4.30	3	4.21	4	4.48	4
4. Emotional Maturity (E)	4.28	4	4.30	3	4.35	7
5. "Move ahead" (I)	4.24	5	4.17	5	4.45	5
6. Work and Save (I)	4.16	6	3.94	8	4.57	3
7. Depandability (E)	4.16	7	4.13	6	4.24	8
8. Paying bills (I)	4.11	8	3.80	9	4.64	1
9. Own a home (I)	4.05	9	4.03	7	4.19	9
10. Sense of Humor (E)	3.74	10	3.80	10	3.77	10
11. Kind of job (I)	3.62	11	3.58	11	3.73	11
12. College degree (I)	3.38	12	3.42	12	3.44	12

Tau = .5863

E = Expressive

I = Instrumental

TABLE 3. MEAN SCORE AND RANK FOR ALL 23 DESIRABLE TRAITS

Traits	Total Sample	Rank	Males	Rank	Females	Rank
1. Kind and Considerate (E)	4.46	1	4.4	1	4.58	2
2. Understanding (E)	4.31	2	4.33	2	4.39	5
3. Mutual affection (E)	4.30	3	4.21	8	4.48	4
4. Emotional maturity (E)	4.28	4	4.30	5	4.35	7
5. Good health (I)	4.26	5	4.31	4	4.28	9
6. "Move ahead" (I)	4.24	6	4.23	3	4.39	6
7. Neatness, refinement (E)	4.20	7	4.28	7	4.19	11
8. Work and save (I)	4.16	8	3.94	13	4.57	3
9. Dependability (E)	4.16	9	4.13	9	4.24	10
10. Paying bills (I)	4.11	10	3.80	12	4.64	1
11. Own a home (I)	4.05	11	4.30	6	4.35	8
12. Sexual attraction (E)	3.85	12	4.03	10	3.67	16
13. Liking for people (E)	3.74	13	3.78	15	3.86	12
14. Sense of humor (E)	3.74	14	3.80	14	3.77	14
15. Desire children (I)	3.73	15	3.72	16	3.78	13
16. Kind of job (I)	3.62	16	3.58	18	3.73	15
17. Ambition for social status (I)	3.61	17	3.66	17	3.65	17
18. Good cook (I)	3.44	18	3.95	11	2.78	22

Tau = .6364

E = Expressive

I = Instrumental

TABLE 3. Continued

Traits	Total Sample	Rank	Males	Rank	Females	Rank
19. College degree (I)	3.38	19	3.42	19	3.44	18
20. Similar Education (I)	3.26	20	3.32	20	3.26	19
21. Similar religion (E)	2.91	21	2.86	22	3.02	20
22. Political philosophy (E)	2.82	22	2.91	21	2.79	21
23. Ability to dance (I)	2.20	23	2.33	23	2.07	23

Tau = .6364

E = Expressive

I = Instrumental